

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 SY-04 SCCT-01 OPR-01

USSS-00 IO-10 AID-05 (ISO) W
----- 087216

O 091200Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8761

INFO AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY DACCA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL KARACHI IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL LAHORE IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 1223

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, PGOV, PK, AF

SUBJECT: FRONTIER LEADER ASSASSINATED IN PAKISTAN

SUMMARY. SHERPAO, THE DE FACTO LEADER OF THE NWFP GOVERNMENT, WAS KILLED IN A BOMB BLAST AT PESHAWAR UNIVERSITY LATE FEBRUARY 8. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE INCIDENT IS UNCLEAR, ALTHOUGH SEVERAL GOP MINISTERS HAVE INSINUATED THAT THE ASSASSINATION, LIKE OTHER BOMBINGS OVER THE PAST YEAR, WAS THE WORK OF THE NATIONAL AWAMI PARTY (NAP), WITH AFGHAN SUPPORT. NAP HAS DENIED THESE CHARGES IN THE PAST. SHERPAO'S DEATH WILL NOT THREATEN THE SURVIVAL OF THE NWFP COALITION IN THE SHORT TERM, BUT BHUTTO WILL HAVE TO MAKE NEW POLITICAL ARRANGEMENTS THERE TO SHORE UP THE SHAKY COALITION AS WELL AS HIS PARTY'S PROVINCIAL BRANCH. IT IS POSSIBLE THE PM MAY TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO BAN THE NAP AND JAIL ITS LEADER WALI KHAN. ALTHOUGH SUCH A
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MOVE IS LIKELY TO BE UNPOPULAR IN NWFP, IT PROBABLY WOULD BE

ACCEPTED ELSEWHERE. THE ASSASSINATION AND ITS AFTERMATH
IN PAKISTAN WILL ADD NEW STRAINS TO PAK-AFGHAN RELATIONS.
END SUMMARY.

1. THE DE FACTO LEADER OF THE NWFP GOVERNMENT, SENIOR MINISTER HAYAT MOHAMMAD KHAN SHERPAO, WAS KILLED IN A BOMB BLAST AT PESHAWAR UNIVERSITY IN LATE AFTERNOON FEBRUARY 8. SHERPAO HAD BEEN, IN EFFECT, BHUTTO'S VICEROY FOR THIS STRATEGIC AND OFTEN TURBULENT PROVINCE. POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE ASSASSINATION HAS BEEN UNDERScoreD BY BHUTTO'S DECISION TO CANCEL HIS VISIT TO ROMANIA AND RETURN TO PAKISTAN DIRECTLY FROM THE US. HE IS EXPECTED TO ARRIVE IN ISLAMABAD LATE SUNDAY EVENING.

2. SO FAR, GOP AND NWFP SPOKESMEN HAVE NOT MADE ANY SPECIFIC ACCUSATIONS AS TO THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ASSASSINATION. SEVERAL ARRESTS HAVE BEEN MADE, BUT THE AUTHORITIES HAVE NOT DIVULGED EITHER THE NUMBER OR THE IDENTITY OF THOSE DETAINED. HOWEVER, SEVERAL GOP LEADERS (E.G., FEDERAL MINISTERS ABDUL QAIYUM KHAN AND ABDUL HAFIZ PIRZADA) HAVE IN THEIR CONDOLENCE MESSAGES USED CODE WORDS WHICH CAN BE READILY INTERPRETED TO SUGGEST THAT THE NATIONAL AWAMI PARTY (NAP) VERY POSSIBLY WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE AFGHAN GOVERNMENT, IS TO BLAME. THE PAK AUTHORITIES, LED BY BHUTTO HIMSELF HAVE, OF COURSE, REPEATEDLY CHARGED THE NAP AND THE ALLEGED BACKERS IN KABUL WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHER BOMB BLASTS IN THE PROVINCE (AND ELSEWHERE IN PAKISTAN) OVER THE PAST YEAR.

3. THE ASSASSINATION OF SHERPAO WAS THE SECOND ATTEMPT ON HIS LIFE IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS: AN EFFORT TO KILL HIM LATE IN 1974 FAILED WHEN A BOMB PLANTED AT A PUBLIC MEETING HE WAS TO ADDRESS AT CHARSADE WENT OFF BEFORE HE HAD REACHED THE SCENE. AT THAT TIME, AND, INDEED, AFTER ALMOST EVERY BOMBING IN THE PROVINCE, GOVERNMENT AND NAP SPOKESMEN EXCHANGED ALLEGATIONS. THE GOVERNMENT BLAMED THE NAP; THAT PARTY CHARGED THE GOVERNMENT WITH PLANTING THE BOMBS ITSELF IN ORDER TO DISCREDIT THE OPPOSITION AND PROVIDE A PRETEXT FOR REPRESSIVE MEASURES. SOME OBSERVERS HOLD THAT YOUNGER, LESS RESPONSIBLE NAP ELEMENTS WERE INVOLVED IN DISREGARD OF THE INSTRUCTIONS OF PARTY LEADERS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT BHUTTO

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HAS BEEN RECEIVING CONFLICTING ASSESSMENTS FROM DIFFERENT POLICE AND INTELLIGENCE AGENCY SOURCES.

4. SHERPAO'S DEATH DEPRIVES BHUTTO OF THE ONLY STRONG PPP LEADER HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO RELY ON FOR THE GOVERNING OF NWFP. THERE IS HOWEVER NO IMMEDIATE DANGER TO THE RULING COALITION HEADED BY CHIEF MINISTER GANDAPUR, A NEW RECRUIT TO THE PPP. THOUGH POLITICALLY WEAK, THE CHIEF MINISTER WILL BE ABLE TO CARRY ON-

HIS MAJORITY SUPPORT IN THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY IS NOT IN QUESTION--AIDED IN THE CONDUCT OF DAY-TO-DAY ADMINISTRATION BY THE CHIEF SECRETARY, AN ABLE, HARD-NOSED OFFICIAL WHOSE

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 USIE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 SY-04 SCCT-01 OPR-01

UOSS-00 IO-10 AID-05 (ISO) W
----- 087215

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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8762

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 1223

LOYALTY TO THE PRIME MINISTER IS UNQUESTIONABLE. BUT IN THE LONGER TERM, BHUTTO WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE TO DEVISE A NEW ARRANGEMENT TO ASSURE HIS OWN CONTINUING CONTROL OVER THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, A SHAKY COALITION HELD TOGETHER BY PERSONAL TIES, GREED, AND FEAR. CONSUL EVERTS REPORTS FROM PESHAWAR THE LOCAL SPECULATION THAT BHUTTO WILL TRY TO SEND A STRONGMAN FROM THE CENTER; HOME MINISTER QAIYUM AND THE NEW FEDERAL COMMERCE MINISTER MIR AFZAL HAVE BOTH BEEN MENTIONED.

5. THE NWFP POLITICAL SCENE WOULD, OF COURSE, BE SHARPLY CHANGED WERE BHUTTO TO MOVE TO BAN THE NAP AND ARREST ITS LEADERS IN THE WAKE OF THE SHERPAO ASSASSINATION AND THE

PUBLIC EMOTION IT HAS AROUSED. HE HAS BEEN UNWILLING TO
DO SO IN THE PAST, APPARENTLY FEARING THAT SUCH A STEP
WOULD ONLY SUCCEED IN DRIVING THE NAP UNDERGROUND AND MAKING
MARTYRS OF ITS LEADERS WHILE AT THE SAME TIME FURTHER ALIEN-
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ATING POLITICAL ELEMENTS ALREADY DISMAYED BY HIS INSENSITIVITY
TO DEMOCRATIC NORMS. IT IS POSSIBLE HE MAY NOW CONCLUDE,
HOWEVER, THAT HE
MUST DEMONSTRATE STRENGTH IN THE FACE OF A CHALLENGE; HE MAY
ALSO SEE THE PRESENT SITUATION AS A PROPITIOUS MOMENT FOR
ACTING (WITH PUBLIC SUPPORT, AT LEAST OUTSIDE THE NWFP)
AGAINST DISCREDITED ENEMIES. (CONSUL EVERTS SPECULATES THAT
ALTHOUGH SUCH A MOVE WOULD BE UNPOPULAR IN NWFP, NAP WOULD
PROBABLY NOT BE ABLE TO MOUNT A CAMPAIGN THAT WOULD THREATEN
GOVERNMENT CONTROL.)

6. THE ASSASSINATION AND THE EVENTS IN THE NWFP WHICH WILL
FOLLOW IN ITS WAKE ARE LIKELY TO HAVE SIGNIFICANT REPERCUS-
SIONS ON PAK-AFGHAN RELATIONS. THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF THESE
REPERCUSSIONS WILL BE CONDITIONED BY MANY FACTORS: THE
DEGREE OF AFGHAN COMPLICITY THE PAKS ARE ABLE OR WILL CLAIM
TO HAVE ESTABLISHED THE REACTION OF THE GOA ITSELF TO THE
EVENTS, AND THE RELATIVE SEVERITY OF THE PAK COUNTERMEASURES
AGAINST THE NAP ALL WILL BE IMPORTANT. SO TOO WILL BHUTTO'S
OWN ASSESSMENT OF HIS DOMESTIC POLITICAL REQUIREMENTS AND
HIS READING OF INTERNATIONAL ATTITUDES TOWARD PAK-AFGHAN
TIES FOLLOWING HIS VISIT TO THE US.
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